

CAMORRA SKETCHED BY AN ITALIAN NOVELIST

E. Srao Tells of the Ingenuity and Audacity of the Famous Criminal Association of Naples

The following sketches, drawn from life, are the latest work from the pen of the famous Neapolitan novelist, E. Srao, who is regarded as the greatest living authority on the Camorra, and who has devoted many years of his life to a close study of the nature and characteristics of this extraordinary criminal association. The sketches are of especial interest in view of the recent close of the trial of the Camorrist chiefs at Viterbo.

In times of police activity against the Camorra the "Honored Society" is wont, every now and then, to inflict some punishment upon the most conspicuous member of the corps. As a rule it takes the form of some harmless demonstration which is meant only as an affirmation of the power of this secret criminal society.

Under the rule of Chief Police Commissioner Pennino, who had been a clever and energetic Magistrate, the Camorra received no quarter and its chiefs decided he deserved a lesson. They, therefore, sent him this laconic warning:

"Within twenty-four hours your watch will be stolen."

The Commissioner smiled incredulously and when he left his office he had forgotten all about it. Two street arabs were rolling over each other on the pavement, furiously biting and scratching each other. He separated the combatants and succeeded in putting an end to their fight, but a few moments later he noticed that his watch was gone. The next day he found it on his writing table at the office. It was wrapped in a piece of paper on which he read:

"Be more careful the next time!"

Almost a week passed. One day a woman came to him; she was pale and shabbily dressed and told him a pitiful tale of poverty and want. She was the wife of a retired public officer, who had suffered severe reverses and was now ill, lacking food, fuel and medicines.

Police Commissioner Pennino was much moved, especially as the lady and her husband belonged to that class of people for whom it is a cruel trial to avoid their poverty. He went with her to the cheerless home, gave them help, comforted them with words of hope and left them with moistened eyes. When he looked for his watch it was gone, but in its place he found a written card which said:

"Your watch will be returned, but be on your guard, for the third time it will go for good."

He at once returned to the home of the people he had just visited and helped, but every trace of them was gone.

The next day the watch was on his writing table, but in accordance with the warning given him it was stolen a third time and it never came back. It was taken from him at the races while he was in conversation with several ladies and gentlemen of rank on one of the stands.

Capt. Fabroni, the famous officer of Carabinieri, who was so prominent in the recent Camorra trial at Viterbo, and who directed the investigations which led to the indictment of thirty-six prisoners, has also been the victim of what is called by Camorrist "a theft for spite."

He lived in a small apartment within the Carabinieri barracks. One day, while he was out, two men dressed in the uniform of Municipal Guards came to the barracks. Only one of them went in, while the other waited outside. The Carabinieri on duty at the door thought nothing of it, for such men often came to gather data for their reports from the registers. In fact, the man who had remained in the street asked him a few questions about the number of officers residing in the barracks, their families, &c. He was soon joined by his companion, who carried a roll of papers under his arm, and both retired away.

When Capt. Fabroni returned, he found his little apartment had been ransacked. Papers, knickknacks, books, linen, were strewn over the floor in fantastic disorder. It was soon ascertained that scarcely anything had been taken—a few unimportant documents, a paper knife and some other insignificant trifles. The theft was not intended to be a robbery, but a humiliation, not a consummation. By it the Camorra had meant to say to Capt. Fabroni:

"You may persecute me, but I have proved to you that I can come in your house, do with you what I please, when I please and take from you even the documents with which you mean to incriminate me, if I choose to do so."

An aristocratic looking gentleman, followed by his secretary, both foreigners in appearance, enters a magnificent jewelry shop in Naples.

"I am Lord X," he says. "My wife, Lady X, is at the Grand Hotel and wishes to see a diamond necklace."

"With great pleasure will I wait upon your Lordship," answers the jeweler. He goes to the showcase and brings out an assortment of costly necklaces.

"I am not a connoisseur of such trinkets," says nonchalantly the English nobleman. "You had better tell me which of these you would consider suitable to a lady of Lady X's rank."

"I should say this one of this other," suggests the jeweler.

"Very well, Lady X. will see them both. How much must I deposit to have the two necklaces on approval? When Lady X. has made her choice I will pay the balance."

"In elegant leather and velvet cases and handed to the dignified and solemn secretary, who leaves the shop."

My lord takes a seat and lights a costly cigar.

An hour passes, two hours, three hours. The secretary does not reappear. The English nobleman gives signs of impatience, the jeweler begins to entertain some unpleasant thoughts.

The evening has come on; it is time to close the shop.

something has happened to him!"

"You will pay me?"

"Certainly. Only I regret I have not much money with me, because I had given a large sum to my secretary this morning to have it banked. Will you take my check?"

"Indeed, I will not!" exclaims the jeweler, who has finally lost control of himself. "Who tells me your check is good?"

"I am surprised? An English peer to receive such treatment from a common merchant! Let me tell you once for all that Lord X's check is good all over the world!"

"You may take it as you like, but I must have \$20,000 in payment of the two necklaces your secretary has taken away!"

The voice of the exasperated jeweler could be heard from the street. A few

the operation. Then the three criminals go to the safe, fill their pockets with everything they can carry and quietly leave the shop by a back door.

Investigation proved that the false nobleman had assumed the name of an English lord who at the time was really stopping at the Grand Hotel, and it was the real Lady X, who, entirely ignorant of the use which was being made of her name, had answered the telephone.

Several years ago the Neapolitan Jurist Senator Vacca, who occupied one of the highest positions in the Magistracy, inaugurated the session of the Italian Parliament with a speech in which he announced he had opened war upon the Camorra and would not rest until he had effaced every vestige of this criminal organization.

walk with your coat in this state. Just allow me to brush you off."

With his hand and his handkerchief he quickly removes the dust from the Senator's frock coat.

"Thank you! Thank you!" murmurs the Magistrate. "You are very kind."

He puts his hand to his pocket as if to give him something for his trouble.

"God forbid, your Excellency!" exclaims the youth. "I hope you will not insult me by offering to remunerate me for such a trifling service. We are poor people, but we know the duty of an honest working man toward his superiors!"

He touches his cap and walks away.

Senator Vacca resumes his walk profoundly edified by the noble attitude of this man of the people.

Two hours later, wishing to make a purchase, he puts his hand to his breast



CLUTCHES HIS THROAT IN AN IRON GRIP.

"My lord, your secretary does not seem to be coming back. I cannot wait any longer," says the jeweler.

"I also am anxious at his delay. Could something have happened to him? He is usually so punctual, so quick."

"Your lordship must tell me what do."

"Is it possible you should have doubts?"

"God forbid! But your lordship will understand. The hours are passing. I must go home. We must decide what to do."

"It is easy to decide. Let us go to the hotel. Or no, wait; it will be quicker to telephone."

"I was just about to suggest it."

"All right."

The jeweler picks up the receiver and calls up the Grand Hotel.

"Hello! Is this the Grand Hotel? Please let me speak with Lady X. Is this Lady X?"

"Hello," answers in English a woman's voice.

The jeweler knows that language and asks: "Has his lordship's secretary brought your ladyship the two diamond necklaces?"

"I have received nothing," answers the voice.

The receiver falls from the jeweler's hands; he is frightfully pale.

"Your lordship must explain," he falters. "Your secretary—"

The whole story is told to these officers of the law. The brigadier listens attentively and says:

"This English gentleman will certainly make no difficulty in following us to the nearest police station."

"Certainly not. I will give your superior officers such guarantees that they will at once release me," says the English lord.

In the meanwhile he has made sure that there is no one in the shop but the jeweler, himself and the two carabinieri.

In a moment my lord, who is strong and massive as an oak, springs upon the helpless merchant, clutches his throat in the iron grip of his two powerful hands, seizes him, takes a rope from his pockets and binds him hand and foot.

The two false carabinieri assist in

The Camorra chiefs were assembled soon after and decided that the Magistrate should be punished for the temerity of his words.

The next day Senator Vacca left his handsome home for his daily walk. In Piazza dei Martiri he stopped before a bookseller's window where were exposed some learned works which immensely interested him.

Of a sudden a common man of the street, dressed like a bran seller and apparently drunk, knocked him in the back with his elbow. The Senator turned to look severely at the drunken man and noticed that his frock coat was all soiled with flour dust.

In the meanwhile a slender young man of the people had thrown himself upon the drunken brute and was violently pomeling him.

"Why do you hit me?" drawled the man, barely able to stand on his feet. "I swear by the blessed San Gennaro I did not do it on purpose."

"Let him alone," now put in the Senator, mollified. "He evidently did not mean to strike me."

"Yes, but he must learn better manners! Another time he will know how to walk straight and not soil a gentleman like your Excellency," answers, red in the face, the young man who had been chastising him.

"He is quite right!" exclaims an on-looker. "These streets are very much frequented by foreigners and it is not fair that for a few ill bred people Naples should get a bad name."

In the meanwhile, rejoins the zealous young workman, turning to the old gentleman, "you cannot resume your

pocket. His pocketbook, bulging with banknotes, is gone."

It is useless to add that the drunken man was only the thief's aid-de-camp.

The next day Senator Vacca found the pocketbook in his private office, carefully placed in the middle of his writing table. Within it, where the bank notes had been, was a short letter worded thus:

"Excellency! It is ungenerous to speak ill of the absent, and the Camorrist whom you have slandered in your speech, to remind you of their presence and power, have played a little joke upon you. Now that the joke is over, they return to you what was taken by one of them."

"Only, as the Commission for the Relegation of Criminals to the Island Penitentiaries has, in consequence of your recent speech, sent about one hundred of our members to spend the summer on a detention island near the coast of Africa, the Naples Camorrist take the liberty of withholding the three hundred dollars which were in the pocketbook as a generous loan from your excellency, which will be used to send cigars and some other small luxury to their suffering companions."

"The Naples Camorrist undertake and pledge themselves to return this amount when your excellency shall have decreed the abolition of relegation to the island penitentiaries."

In 1894 Commander Perego was Chief Police Commissioner at Naples. Being a man of a rigid and stern nature, he decided to give no quarter to the Camorra, and so effectively did he prosecute the members of this society that

Tricks Played Even on the Police by Way of Warning—Skill Shown in Humorously Odd Robberies

he was known to them as "the Nero of Camorrist."

Two alert young Camorrist decided to play him a trick. Each one of them was to try his hand at it and the more successful of the two was to receive an important premium for the exploit.

A few days later the Police Commissioner received the visit of an impressive looking gentleman who spoke French fluently and introduced himself as an officer of the Paris police, bearing official letters of introduction and an invitation to study the organization of the Italian police and report upon it to Commissioner Lepine, who was about to introduce radical reforms in the police of Paris.

Commissioner Perego was gratified and flattered by the visit, conversed at length with his French colleague, showed him the archives and finally invited him to lunch for the next day.

About half an hour later Commissioner Perego prepared to go home for dinner and opened a drawer of his writing table to take from it his revolver, which he always carried on his person when outside his office. The revolver was gone!

The elegant and impressive looking officer of the French police, who it was afterward discovered was an accomplished international thief, had taken it.

The next day, while the whole personnel at police headquarters were still raving at the impudence of the outrage, the men on duty in the outer corridors of the offices saw a man appear, bent under the weight of a long ladder. He wore overalls and on his head a cap like those worn by the workmen of the Electrical Society of Naples.

The man placed his ladder against the wall, mounted it, took out his tools and set to work to detach the big electric indicator, which gave out the numbers of the various offices as the bells rang to call the attendants. He took the whole thing down, descended the ladder and turned to walk away with it on his shoulders.

One of the attendants, an old man who was helping himself to a pinch of snuff, looked at him and asked:

"How long will it take you to fix it?"

"It will be done by to-morrow, with the help of God," answered the man.

"All right, take it along, but mind you repair it properly!"

"Don't you worry; I will make the best job of it you ever saw," returned the man with a wink.

Off he went carrying the indicator and the ladder.

For several days the Commissioner and all the other police chiefs pressed in vain the buttons of their electric bells and scolded and fumed because their calls were not answered.

"I beg your pardon, your Excellency," the old attendant would go around explaining, "the electric indicator has been taken away to be repaired."

A couple of weeks passed and when it

"What can I say?" the old attendant would philosophically repeat between each pinch of snuff, "these devilish thieves must have a joke now and then!"

This time they had come to play their practical joke right within the sacred precincts of police headquarters.

A poor, partially blind, man used to stop often with his old violin to play a few airs before the shop of a well-to-do grocer in the Via Salvatore Rossa in Naples and receive a few pennies from his hearers. One day he said to the grocer:

"Don Gennaro, I have put together a little money to-day and want to go and have a good time in a country tavern without being bothered by my violin. Will you be so kind as to keep it for me? I will come for it this evening!"

"All right, leave it there," answered the stout grocer, pointing to a chair in the corner of the shop.

The fiddler laid his violin upon it and walked out and away.

A few hours later a man with a dignified bearing enters the grocery store to buy a pound of coffee and chances to see the violin.

"A nice instrument," he says. "It must be a good violin. Do you play it?"

The fat grocer laughs and answers: "Lord, no! That is the poor half-broken instrument of a destitute old fiddler who has left it there for a few hours."

"You don't say! It looks to me like a Stradivarius."

"A Stradivarius, the best make there is!"

"Is that so? It seems almost incredible!"

"Will you allow me to try it?"

"Is the gentleman a violinist?"

"I am a passionate lover of the instrument."

Here the grocer's customer takes up the violin and, with eyes glistening with emotion, seizes the bow and plays a few chords on the old strings.

"What delight! What a treasure! Could you not sell it to me?"

"I have already said it belongs to a poor, ragged, half-blind wretch, a miserable fiddler, who earns his living with it."

"All the more reason to sell it to me. I would give him two hundred dollars."

"It is now the turn of the grocer's eyes to glisten."

"Two hundred dollars!" he exclaims. "It is not a bad sum; but I am afraid he will refuse. He is very much attached to it and it is the only means he has of earning his bread."

"Let it be two hundred and fifty."

"Oh, I do not believe he will accept."

"Three hundred."

"Impossible!"

"Three hundred and fifty."

"Listen to me, sir. If you will go as far as five hundred I am sure the bargain will be closed."



HE SUCCEEDED IN PUTTING AN END TO THEIR FIGHT.

became evident that the indicator, like the Commissioner's revolver, had gone for good a new one had to be bought.

"Five hundred is too much. Make it four hundred and let us speak no more about it. But you are sure the man will consent?"

"As sure as if I had already sold it to you, sir."

"Still I want to be certain of the transaction and I want you to be equally so. Here are fifty dollars deposit."

"It is not necessary."

"Yes, it is. Business is business. When can I take with the rest of the money to come this precious instrument?"

"This evening at eight."

"Very well. Good-by."

He goes out. The grocer is in ecstasies. What a splendid, unheard-of piece of business!

The poor fiddler comes in due time and the grocer, with many blandishments, tries to get him to give up his violin for fifty dollars.

The man refuses, resists to pressure, declares his instrument is of a fine make. After much discussion, he agrees to part with it for \$200.

"Who would have thought it!" exclaims the grocer to himself. "Who would have imagined he would get such a sum out of me! Anyway I shall always clear a clean two hundred out of the bargain."

The fiddler is in haste to pocket his money and the grocer is equally desirous to get him out of the way, so he pays into his hands the \$200.

From that day no one saw him any more fiddling in the streets. Nor did the passionate violin lover ever again put in an appearance.

The disconsolate grocer remained the possessor of an instrument worth about three dollars, while the two thieves divided \$100.

WHAT IS THE LOWEST SALARY ON WHICH A YOUNG MAN MAY MARRY?

The young man working on a small salary who contemplates marriage with the idea that it takes to keep one, justifying his opinion by the experience of some friend or acquaintance, will probably find that what appears to be meat for one is very often fish for another.

There are three points to be carefully considered by every young man who would enter into marriage with no income other than a small or moderate salary. And these points are of equal importance to the young woman of his choice.

The first requisite is good health. Judged from any point of view it is self-evident folly for a young man or woman of unsound physical condition to enter into wedlock and this folly becomes positively suicidal when the young man's salary is sufficient to provide only the necessities of life.

Doubtless there are those who will say it would be unreasonable to expect two young people, in love, to dismiss their thoughts of conjugal happiness with the observation "We can't think of marrying—the risk is too great—we might be sick some day." But granting his unsoundness, such an attitude would be wisdom itself compared with the thoughtlessness displayed by one young couple.

A case in point is that of a young man living in New York. His sole income was a salary of \$18 a week. He was in splendid health and he felt that

his future prospects justified his desire to marry. The young woman was an employee in a department store at a salary of \$10 a week. In New York one cannot do much more than merely live on \$10 a week; with such an income one's savings must necessarily be very small. In her effort to make a good impression the savings from her meagre salary, which should have gone into some badly needed dental work, were spent for ribbons and trinkets.

Soon after they were married an attack of facial neuralgia revealed the need of prompt dental treatment. Exactly six months from the date of their marriage the young couple found themselves owing a dentist's bill of \$75 before being confronted with the necessity of replenishing their winter wardrobe. To meet these unanticipated but necessary expenditures meant very frugal living, for their savings amounted to less than \$20.

The second point to consider is whether the living expenses will leave a small margin for saving. It does not seem that a salary of \$12 a week would cover the actual living expenses of two people, yet one couple demonstrated that it could. In a certain middle Western town two young people decided to marry. The young man's salary was \$11 a week. After notifying his employer of his intentions his salary was increased to \$12. With admirable wisdom the young woman pointed out that if they had thought it possible to live on \$11

the extra dollar could be saved each week.

The young man had a savings account of \$75, all of which was used for purchasing household furnishings. The young woman's savings, amounting to \$50, were spent for a sensible trousseau of plain, necessary garments. Two rooms were found on the outskirts of the town the rental for which was \$2 a week. The \$75 did not provide elaborate furnishings, but with careful purchases and gifts from friends the rooms were made very comfortable. Heat was not provided and during the winter months fuel meant an average weekly expenditure of another \$2.

Not counting the dollar which was saved this left \$7 of the weekly income to be used for clothes and food. Not very much, to be sure, but the young couple found it possible not only to live within the amount but they made it a rule never to spend their entire income. There was always something saved from the \$11, something to be added each week to the dollar which they had decided to "forget." One week their savings amounted to three cents and one red letter Saturday night found a balance of \$118. Between these two amounts there was enough saved to make the weekly margin average 65 cents.

In the early spring permission was obtained to raise vegetables on a vacant lot next to where they lived. The young wife turned this opportunity to good

account and enough vegetables were raised to supply their own needs as well as those of the family from whom they rented. At the end of the first year their savings bank balance was \$80. Eighteen months from the date of their marriage they made a first payment of \$100 on a house. Their income would not enable them to enjoy the luxury of their purchase, but they considered it a good investment for their savings.

The house brought a monthly rental of \$15, \$12 of which went as a monthly payment to the company from which it had been purchased; the balance they added to their regular savings account. The husband's salary had been increased three times within five years, and to-day, after six years of happy, helpful companionship, they have a home more than half paid for and every prospect for a bright future.

Such an illustration demonstrates what two people may accomplish with a small salary providing both are willing to save. Of course any one will appreciate that it is the wife who furnishes the inspiration for such a venture; she not only points the way but it is through her help and encouragement that success is made possible.

The third consideration should be the young man's future prospects. If he has no income but his salary the permanency of his position should, by all means, be reasonably certain. Many a matrimonial venture has encountered

disastrous conditions through the husband being temporarily thrown out of work.

Of course it is not always possible to anticipate such things, but there should at least be more consideration given this point than was displayed by one young man. A salary of \$25 a week seemed to him to provide sufficient income to warrant his marrying. The firm employing him was on the verge of dissolution—a fact which the stockholders kept carefully guarded for reasons best known to themselves.

Two months after his marriage the young man found himself out of a position and when he expressed to the firm his opinion of what he considered a very unfair treatment he was informed that his unfortunate dilemma was of his own making. "Had you not formed us of your intentions to marry," said one of the firm, "you would have been told that we were contemplating a change which might affect your prospects."

After three months of idleness, during which period he and his wife were forced to live on the bounty of relatives, the young husband found a position at \$15 a week. A lack of forethought had placed him under obligations which would require months to discharge. The wife, a girl of admirable character, helped to meet the situation by finding a position and assisting in paying off the debts which her husband's idleness had incurred.

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